

# Forgotten Histories

# THE BRITISH IN PARANÁ:

# The story of Parana Plantations

Adam Patterson, Honorary British Consul in Paraná

"The northern region of Paraná State, Brazil, was colonized by a British company during the second quarter of the twentieth century. The whole territory was parcelled into small rural plots, a cluster of regularly spaced towns was founded and a railway line built in a systematic colonialization of the region. British planning ideas and practices were applied in this area, and helped shaped the urbanization process of Brazilian hinterlands."

# Renato Rego, Historian and Professor at the University of Maringa, Paraná

"Londrina has deep British roots, in both its name and DNA. Capital of the North of Paraná, the fourth largest city in the South of Brazil, with almost 600,000 inhabitants, it owes its dynamism to the colonization model implemented in the region, 85 years ago, by Paraná Plantations (*Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná*), a company founded in 1924 with British investment.

### Marcelo Belinati Martins, Mayor of Londrina, Paraná

"The UK and Brazil have been friends and partners for over 200 years. There are many local narratives throughout Brazil that show how these ties run deep. In 2019 we inaugurated the British Memorial in the city of Curitiba, to acknowledge and commemorate British history in the city and the state of Paraná. In doing so, we are building on the work of those that came before us."

HE Vijay Rangarajan, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Brazil

# Introduction

THE UK AND BRAZIL have extensive historic political and economic connections going back over 200 years. The UK made a powerful contribution to Brazil's development. Many British and Brazilian historians have made important contributions in this space.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, relative to many other countries, especially those marked "pink" on those old colonial era maps, this bilateral relationship, rich in history and cooperation, is perhaps not well known in the broader public consciousness, away from the government, academic and the international relations spaces. As Alan Charlton, British Ambassador to Brazil between 2008–2013 has noted, despite these links, he was "struck by how little was known about this nowadays in both countries. These connections are not just a matter of historical record. They affect how the two countries see each other as potential partners for the future".<sup>2</sup>

And if this lack of "historical memory", the way by which groups of people create and then identify with specific narratives about historical periods or events, is lacking at the macro country level, then this would certainly be the case at subnational and local levels – or in other words, the British relationships with individual



states and cities within the huge country that is Brazil, especially those places outside of the major, and well known, urban areas such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These smaller-scale interactions between individuals, organizations and government actors have in effect helped create their own social and historic reality, within the framework of local British history in Brazil. Microhistorical focuses therefore, in the words of De Vito, serve as "fragments through which universal processes can be observed."

This Canning House Forgotten Histories paper then seeks to highlight the important regional level British history in Paraná, a state in the South of Brazil, summarize existing literature, and contribute in a small way to the democratization of knowledge of this bilateral legacy. History can also play a role in shaping the direction of international trade.<sup>4</sup> The paper reviews the historical narrative of UK-Brazil relations before delving deeper into the local level relationships in Paraná, with a key focus on the Parana Plantations enterprise which played a major role in the urban and industrial development of the north of the state during the second quarter of the twentieth century.

# **UK & Brazil: the historical context**

The United Kingdom's relationship with Brazil started even before Brazil became an independent sovereign country. The initial defining event was the transfer of the Portuguese Court to Rio de Janeiro in 1807, under the protection of the Royal Navy, just before Napoleon invaded Portugal. This was soon followed by a commercial treaty with Britain that, *de facto*, imposed British led free-trade and in effect opened up Brazil to the world.<sup>5</sup>

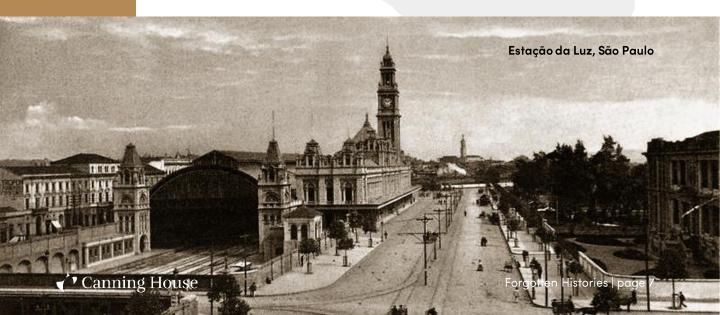
The presence of the Portuguese court in Brazil accelerated that countries societal and commercial development.<sup>6</sup> Independence followed in 1822, mediated by the United Kingdom, led by the efforts of Foreign Secretary George Canning, the great namesake of Canning House, who recognized the newly independent country in 1825. Over the next 100 years, the UK played a dominant role in catalysing capital markets, infrastructure construction and trade, in what Manchester described as the period of "British Preeminence"<sup>7</sup>, exercising significant political, cultural and intellectual influence in Brazil.

British diplomacy in the independence of South America was, generally speaking, focused on trade. The UK was Brazil's largest trade and investing partner for many years over the 19th century up to the 1930's. Brazil supplied almost 40 percent of raw cotton to British factories for the last decade of the 18th century. Prominent British communities in São Paulo and other major cities helped supply specialized and skilled labour in the textiles and railway industries. Indeed, until 1895 practically all foreign investment in Brazil was from the UK and until the first world war, British investors



supplied more long-term capital to Brazil, in government loans and direct investment in railways, agriculture, financial services and public utilities, than any other nation. The UK continued as the largest source of capital until just before the Second World War<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, up to the early 1870's Britain had maintained a share of around half Brazil's total imports and still around a third by at the start of the century<sup>11</sup>.

British investment and commercial banks in Brazil – including the London and Brazilian, the British Bank of South America and the London and River Plate Bank – played major roles in financing trade, agriculture, and industry. The London firm of N.M. Rothschild, as official financing agents to the government held the monopoly on issuing Brazilian federal government securities in the London capital markets from the mid-1850s to the first decade of the 20th century<sup>12</sup>. It is estimated that British banks controlled a third of the deposits of the domestic banking system on the eve of the first World War<sup>13</sup>. British insurance companies were estimated to have had a 25% share of the Brazilian market at around the same time<sup>14</sup>.



The historical links are widespread. The first train in Brazil was pulled by the locomotive "Baronesa", built in England by William Fair Barin & Sons, in 1852. The São Paulo Railway a privately-owned British railway company, was one of the countries' main infrastructure routes. The British San Paulo Gas Company was one of the first companies to develop electricity and public lighting in Brazil, from the 1870's. The first ship to dock at the port of Santos, on February 2, 1892, was the British built Nasmyth, arriving from Liverpool. The UK therefore played a key role in financing and building the country's industrialization and facilitating trade.

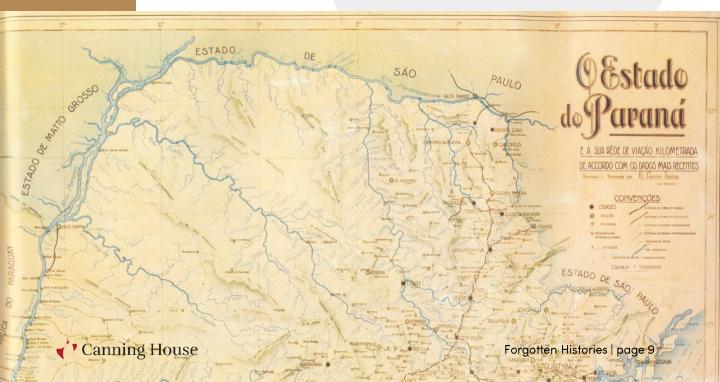
British culture, expertise and capital permeated the country. Nonetheless, this bilateral connection traversed just trade and investment. The Brazilian born Briton Charles Miller, on his return to Brazil in 1894 from schooling in the UK, brought with him the rules of football and his football kit and helped propagate the sport in the country – together with rugby and Polo – and helped set up the first Brazilian football game – in 1895. The connections therefore run deep.

However, from the First World War, British dominance in Brazilian trade and finance was increasingly challenged by other countries, in particular the United States and Germany. In the second half of the 20th century the UK arguably disengaged from the country.<sup>17</sup> However, just as macro level relations started to decline at the onset of the Great War, a new chapter in the British history in Brazil, at the micro-level, was beginning to be written in the South of the country, in Paraná state.

# British Pioneering in the South of Brazil

From the early twentieth century, Paraná state, geographically larger than England, and located in the south of the country, legislated for the commercialization and the sale of land to private parties<sup>18</sup>, mainly located in the north of the state.

This was definitively established with State Law no. 1642 of 1916<sup>19</sup>, enabling the drafting of corporate land concession contracts and, consequently, the rapid occupation of the northern region of the state, with the objective of attracting domestic and foreign settlers, and economically developing the areas. These policies made economic sense for the state, especially coming at the end of the "Contested War", a settler revolt of 1912–1916, on its borders involving both state and federal authorities which had negatively impacted public finances<sup>20</sup>.



During the 1920's, several land concessions were established with companies and farmers. One of these was a British investment company, Parana Plantations, through its Brazilian subsidiary, Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná (CTNP). It has been argued that taxes levied by the State on land occupation yielded as much as agricultural production<sup>21</sup> which made such partnerships doubly attractive as the companies would help boost economic development – a Private Finance Initiative of the early 1900's – and generate much needed income through land sales and tax collection.

Around the same time, at the national level, the Brazilian economy was under pressure from rising debt burdens and the post-war slump in commodity demand.<sup>22</sup> In 1923 against this backdrop, the Brazilian Government requested a £25 million loan from Rothschilds Bank.<sup>23</sup> Together with the country's other major British creditor investment houses Barings and Schroeders, they decided to send a due diligence mission with the express objective to assess Brazilian public finances and economic activity.<sup>24</sup>

Rothschild's bank asked Lord Edwin Samuel Montagu (1879–1924), a retired British politician and former Financial Secretary of the Treasury and Minister for India, to lead this commission, subsequently named the Montagu Mission (or the "English Mission" locally).<sup>25</sup>

Among the members, were Sir Charles Addis, a banker, government advisor and former director of the Bank of England and HSBC, Hartley Withers, former editor of The Economist and Sir William McLintock, a partner in a large British financial services firm.<sup>26</sup> Joining them was a certain Lord Lovat.

## **Enter Lord Lovat**

Brigadier Simon Joseph Fraser, "14th Lord Lovat and 3rd Baron Lovat, KT, GCVO, KCMG, CB, DSO (25 November 1871 – 18 February 1933), was an aristocrat, landowner, colonialist, soldier, politician and the 23rd Chief of Clan Fraser (widely known as the 16th Lord)".<sup>27</sup> He was one of those extraordinary characters of the Victorian age, exemplifying the era's spirit of public service, duty, capitalism and adventure.

After raising a battalion – The Lovat Scouts – to fight in the Second Boer War (1899–1902), in which he was awarded the Distinguished

Service Order (DSO), he went on to fight in the First World War where he was also decorated for bravery. Lovat was Chairman of the Forestry Commission from 1919 to 1927 and served in the Conservative administration of Stanley Baldwin as Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs from 1927 to 1929. He was also a specialist in agriculture, and a founding-director in the private British colonial agriculture and irrigation enterprise the **Plantations** Sudan Syndicate, established in the early 1900's to produce cotton for the British textile industry.<sup>28</sup>



Based on this experience in agriculture in emerging markets he was invited by Lord Montagu to take part in the Finance Mission which arrived in Brazil in December 1923. After official meetings in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and concluding the mission, he travelled down to the neighboring state of Paraná, to a small town called Cambará to assess additional land and rail investment opportunities in a personal capacity.<sup>29</sup>

At the time, the northern region of Paraná – created a Province in 1853 from mostly São Paulo state territory – was then, with the exception of the capital Curitiba (founded in 1693) and Paranaguá port in the east, relatively underdeveloped and remote. Indeed, even on official government maps, the region was often shown as a blank area.<sup>30</sup>

The Brazilian engineer Gastão de Mesquita Filho<sup>31</sup> helped arrange meetings for Lord Lovat with the owners of the São Paulo-Paraná railway company. Furthermore, Mesquita drew Lovat's attention to the "forgotten lands of Paraná"<sup>32</sup>, which the state government had offered for sale. Mesquita, argued that it would be interesting to acquire the railroad and to extend it in order to "guarantee the flow of wood and other agricultural products through the port of Santos to England"<sup>33</sup>, which would also increase the value of local land and boost agricultural production. It seems likely that Lovat was already knowledgeable of this region, close to the Tibagi River, and attentive to potential business opportunities. He arrived in the area in January of 1924, interested in finding out more about local cotton production and also negotiating land and railroads in the region.

# Parana Plantations is born

Lovat was impressed with the productive potential of the land and started putting together a project that would interest British investors. Over the next year in London he raised capital – originally £200,000 rising to £750,000<sup>34</sup> – and officially founded Parana Plantations Ltd. which would become one of the largest private investment groups in Brazil. He sent his right hand-man from Sudan Plantations, Arthur Miller Thomas to Paraná where in late 1925 he founded the Brazilian subsidiary, the Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná, based out of São Paulo, controlled by Parana Plantations from London.<sup>35</sup> Mr Thomas played a key role in negotiations and company management over the following years.

In October of that year, the company acquired directly from the state government of Paraná approximately one million hectares of land<sup>36</sup>, in 1925, for the amount of "8,712 Contos de Réis", estimated at around £31 million in today's money<sup>37</sup>. The comparatively low figure was due to the lack of roads and infrastructure in the region and the desire of the state government to make sure the deal went forward (the railway construction in particular was a key priority)<sup>38</sup>. Between 1925 and 1927, the Company acquired more land from smaller holdings, adding up to approximately 1,246,300 hectares or 12,463 km<sup>239</sup> (to put that into perspective, that's around 60% of the size of Wales). And so began one of the largest and ambitious, and little known, British colonialization and land development schemes of the twentieth century.

Within a few years, "maps started showing signs of progress and development: dots, lines and a dense geometry were being added as the British company was shaping the landscape with new towns,

rural plots, a network of roads and the railway line"40. The lands were surveyed in detail. With such a large undeveloped region, this was an economic, operational and logistic challenge. This led to subdivision into smaller, more manageable, areas. The commercial strategy of the company sought to sell plots as the railway was constructed and local infrastructure built. The whole enterprise was planned to sustainably house, feed, transport and employ upwards of two million people (which is today the approximate regional population)

both the home countries and the empire.

in integrated settlements. The plans borrowed from British Advert for Parana Plantations land "garden cities" concepts seen in Letchworth and Welwyn in England, which endeavored to optimise the spacing between residential, industrial and civic areas, local transport networks and prioritise public parks and open spaces and

In "A Tropical Enterprise", Brazilian historian Renato Rego, one of the foremost experts on this chapter of local Paraná history affirmed that:

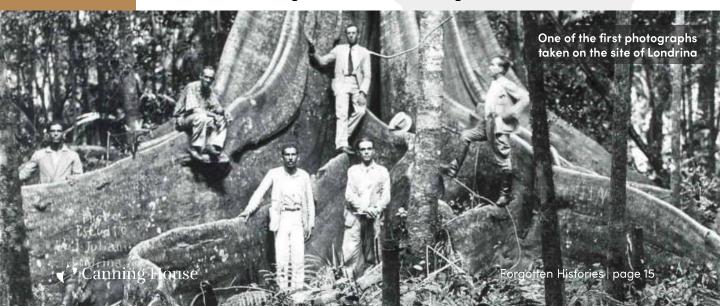
were intended to be rolled out as urban development models for



"Parana Plantations' early development maps show the effect of British planning ideas and previous colonial experiences on the northern Paraná colonization scheme. British town and country planning concepts can be easily recognized in them. For maps can be read not only as a register of geographical features but also as a culturally constructed form of knowledge".<sup>41</sup>

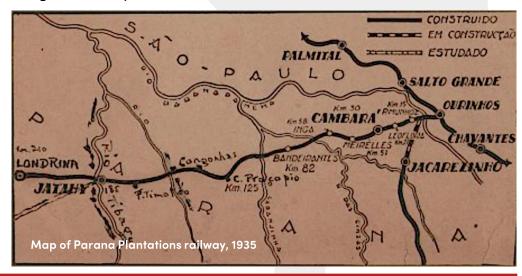
A key innovation introduced by the company was the division of land into relatively small lots, thus promoting workers without means the opportunity to acquire small lots. The Company had a policy of "favouring and supporting small farmers, without neglecting to take into account those who had greater resources".<sup>42</sup> This system greatly stimulated production and population expansion. The north of Paraná is today one of Brazil's most prosperous and productive agricultural regions.

In 1929, Arthur Thomas, together with Briton George Craig Smith, led a surveying group to what today is "ground zero" of the city of Londrina (meaning little London in Portuguese), the first advanced



urban hub of the project. Indeed, just over the first few years of the enterprise nine new towns were founded, namely: Londrina (in 1930), New Dantzig (1932), Roland (1934), Arapongas (1935), Lovat (1937), Itambé (1938), Apucarana (1938), Pirapó (1938) and Jandaia (1938).<sup>43</sup> Today, just these nine these cities have a total population of over one million people. Arthur Thomas's descendants still live in Londrina.

The development of the railways was a key driver in the success of the project, connecting not only the new towns and the agricultural production – mainly coffee – but also ultimately to São Paulo and the largest Brazilian port at Santos. The company's integrated ownership of the land and railway (the company purchased the São Paulo-Paraná railway in 1928<sup>44</sup>) helped enhance economic, operational and logistical synergies. The railway, linking homes to commerce and agriculture, also helped to attract settlers. The company's integrated development plan and the "planted cities" (Rego's term) system seemed to bear fruit.



In one of his last visits to the region in 1931 – he passed away two years later -Lord Lovat welcomed HRH The Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, and his brother Prince younger George (the future George VI) who he had invited to visit the land development.45 This highlights the potential of the importance colonization project in British foreign policy at the time. After a few days in Prince Paulo. the São travelled to Paraná on a



specially commissioned train to the city of Cornélio Procópio, newly connected to the railway network by the company, passing through the station of Leoflora on the way, before visiting the coffee plantations<sup>46</sup>. A triumphant welcome arch had even been built to welcome the future king of the United Kingdom and British Empire. There was much to celebrate.

Construction of the railway was being completed and the company had attracted hundreds of British investors, including leading members of the political and financial establishment. Moreover, helped in part by a company marketing blitz across the UK and Europe, immigrants flocked in, attracted to promises of the 'most fertile land in the world'. The royal visit surely topped off some of the most interesting years in British international investment and indirect colonialization of the first decades of the 20th century. Indeed, Lord Lovat has been called the "most influential Briton in Paraná" in local newspapers. <sup>47</sup> After all, to paraphrase Benjamin Disraeli, legacy is the inheritance of a great example.

# Conclusion: the ties that bind

The Second World War and subsequent British Government measures to liquidate and repatriate international capital holdings to help finance the war effort ended up closing the page on Parana Plantations' ownership of their North Paraná holdings. In 1944, the local subsidiary was sold to the Brazilian management team and domestic investors.<sup>48</sup> The railway was nationalized by the Brazilian Government. Land values in the region had increased over 800% in the 15 years since 1925.<sup>49</sup> And yet, to quote Frank Herbert: "there is no real ending. It's just the place where you stop the story". The now Brazilian owned company – Companhia Melhoramentos Norte do Paraná (CMNP, ex-CTNP) - continued to operate and commercialize land in the region and above all, found new towns, such as Maringá in 1947, today one of the largest cities in the state with over 400,000 habitants, carrying on not only the original Parana Plantations masterplan but the garden city characteristics of British towns. The CMNP company, still headquartered in Paraná, continues operating in the agricultural sector until today.

Over the fifteen years of British controlled operations, nine major urban centers were implemented and three further planned. Roads, railways and fundamental infrastructure were built. A key differential, especially looking through a modern lens, was that Parana Plantations was concerned with not only economic profit per se but ESG concerns that were advanced for the time (and went beyond local legislation requirements): such as building long-term sustainable communities, income distributions of the settlers, subsidized transport and access to local services. <sup>50</sup> As the Historian Dozier noted in the 1950's: "the British entrepreneurs were not simply interested in immediate land sales, but in the development of the whole region". <sup>51</sup>

Lord Lovat himself projected a population of eight families per square kilometer of agricultural land, a number considered high in coffee zones and half of the amount in urban centers at the time.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the official website of Londrina City Hall calls the company's prioritizing and supporting smaller land holdings and farmers "true agrarian reform",<sup>53</sup> that did not depend on state government intervention. Above all the towns were planned in upmost detail and for future expansion and scaling up. Over the



course of British and national ownership, Parana Plantations – considered the largest colonizing company in Brazilian history – was responsible for surveying and developing a huge tract of land and founded 63 towns, which today make up around 16% of all municipalities in the state. The explicit British connection to Londrina – today the second largest city in Paraná – is probably the most well–known of the historical record locally, also proudly shown on the official city hall website.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the true scope of Paraná Plantation's implicit role in economically developing the whole region, is perhaps less well known to a wider audience. And as we have seen, this didn't occur in isolation but was part of a broader period of British influence in Brazil.

Moreover, the British legacy in Paraná state extends beyond the northern region. British immigration in the state started from the 1860's, mostly centered around Curitiba, the state capital, Paranguá port and the British colony of Assunguí (today the town of Cerra Azul). The engineer Thomas Platagaanent Big-Wither mapped and surveyed the state's topography in, botany and geology for the Royal Geographical Society in the mid-1870's,<sup>55</sup> and, one of the first to do so for a European audience. The celebrated author Thomas Hardy wrote about Paraná and the lushness of its lands in his 1891 fictional book "Tess of the d'Urbervilles".

In Curitiba, a lot of the local infrastructure, including roads, lighthouses and industrial plant were built by British companies and professionals. 100 years ago, the city also had a British Mayor, Percy Withers in 1920. Moreover, an important family, the Gomms, local industrialists and twice British Consuls in the early twentieth

century, helped found hospitals, charities and the local country club. Members of the family volunteered to fight for Great Britain in the Second World War.

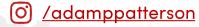
These extensive historic links in Curitiba and the state were celebrated last year in the opening of British Square in Curitiba, the first of its kind in Brazil, in a ceremony attended by the British Ambassador to Brazil, Vijay Rangarajan, the Mayor of Curitiba, Rafael Greca and the author of this piece, together with descendants of the first British immigrants in the city, including the Gomm Family. As M.J. Colewood once put it: "History is all around us and you, my lucky few, are living in some of it". By recognizing and commemorating these "historical fragments" we can strengthen bilateral relationships and build new ones. After all, it is said that 'for an understanding of the future, look to the past'.



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- <sup>37</sup> In a bespoke economic analysis for this paper, Brazilian economist Gabriel Loest Cardoso calculated the current value of the original transaction in pounds sterling. The original purchase price given as 8.7K "Contos de Reis", or 8,700 million mil–réis (literally one thousand réis) was the unit of currency in Brazil until 1942. Based on an estimated historic exchange rate of the mil–réis to the pound sterling and adjusted for inflation to 2020 values, it was estimated that in simple purchasing power terms the relative value of the purchase was £31,2 million. Utilizing the economic share approach (historic value as a percentage of GDP) the value was projected at £267,6 million.

- <sup>38</sup> Boni, Paulo, 2009, Certidões de Nascimento de História: O surgimento de municípios no eixo Londrina–Maringa (Master´s thesis). Available at:
- http://www.uel.br/pos/mestradocomunicacao/wp-content/uploads/certidoes-de-nascimento-da-historiacompleto.pdf.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Rego, 2011.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, p5.
- <sup>42</sup> Official site of Londrina City Hall, available at https://www.londrina.pr.gov.br/historia-cidade.
- <sup>43</sup> Some of the town names were changed over subsequent decades, in some cases due to the supposed Germanic name origins during the war period (see for instance: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandaguari). New Dantzig was later renamed Cambé, Roland became Rolândia, Lovat was changed to Mandaguari and Itambé later became Aricanduva.
- <sup>44</sup> Nunes, Layane, 2019, page 4.
- <sup>45</sup> 'The Princes in Brazil. Visit to Northern Parana', The Times, April 1, 1931.
- <sup>46</sup> Loredo, Luiz, 2017, A pensão da Procópia: Sertanópolis nos tempos do padre Jonas, page XIV.
- <sup>47</sup> https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/vida-e-cidadania/maringa/lord-lovat-o-ingles-mais-influente-do-norte-do-parana-bdnb7qlp5zyd8vtau46zaf9e6/.
- 48 http://www.cmnp.com.br/melhoramentos/historia/.
- <sup>49</sup> Rego (2016) estimated that land values in Parana Plantations land increased from 50¢ in 1925 to \$4.50 (USD) in 1940, a much higher valorization that neighboring lands that were not part of the British enterprise. In Rego, Renato, 2016, Comunidades planejadas na Amazônia: o Urbanismo Rural e a utopia de uma nova civilização, XIV Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica Las utopías y la construcción de la sociedad del futuro Barcelona, page 14.
- Library of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Available at:
  https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/biblioteca-catalogo.html?id=31657&view=detalhes
  Dozier, Craig, 1956, Northern Paraná, Brazil: An Example of an Organized Regional Development, Geographical Review, 318-333.
- <sup>52</sup> Rego (2015) citied in Layane, 2019, page 6.
- 53 https://www.londrina.pr.gov.br/historia-cidade
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Becoming the 1878 book "Pioneering in South Brazil".